1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

cipute yearly in the great initiation festival for boys and girls. Consequently as they repeat each year the lessons of their own initiation, the ceremonies are the main vehicle of Yao culture.[1]

There are also two Moslem ceremonies:

(1) *Jandu*, the boys' Moslem baptism, which takes about seven days, and is usually worked in with *hspanda*:

(2) *Nsondo*, the girls' Moslem baptism, which is the same as *jandu*, but usually quite separate from *ciputu*. It is important that the wife of a Moslem should have her *nsondo* so that she knows how to prepare the food properly at Ramadan.

Menstrual and Other Taboos

Menstruation is held to be dangerous. A special mat is used by the woman during this time, and is rolled up and kept during the rest of the cycle. The hut is completely replastered after menstruation. Intercourse during menses leads to disease of the man. Sexual contact is dangerous to persons at certain other periods: during initiation ceremonies, during mourning, and for babies who have not been through the protective rite. The danger is thought to lie in *ndaka*, a dread disease characterized by swelling. This may be transmitted by salt in the food. Deaths are often attributed to 'salt'. Much of the significance of the mourning is that medicines are prepared which protect the mourners against the dangers attendant on sexual activity.

Burial Rites

News of a death must be sent to the chief by a messenger carrying a single fowl. The chief gives a present of calico for wrapping the body, and a goat for the burial men. These are called *awilo*, neighbours unrelated to the dead, who volunteer for certain duties. They prepare the body for burial and carry it in procession to the graveyard outside the village. No uninitiated person is allowed to see the funeral. All who attend the burial are prohibited from sexual intercourse for one month. After this time the prohibition is lifted by a ceremony of beer drinking and feasting, and on the following day all fires in the village are extinguished, and then relit, and the mourners are shaved. A year later beer is brewed for a final ceremony.

For a period after her husband's death a widow is unclean, and has to be purified by ritual intercourse with a man who is paid. The widow is not allowed to remarry for two or three years. A widower leaves his wife's village, after receiving a parting gift. The widows of ordinary persons are not inherited. If a man has himself a 'name' (rank and social position), he has an heir, who inherits also the wives of his predecessor. But if the heir (the maternal nephew) has married a cross-cousin (mother's brother's daughter) he would not consider the wife's mother as his inherited wife.

Before the burial the dead man's hut used to be destroyed, together with his possessions. Immediately afterwards a consultation is held as to whether retaliatory action against sorcerers is called for. The *awilo*'s duties include not only the conducting of the burial, but also the subsequent inquiry and the conduct of the second ceremony, the beer drinking, at which they shave the mourners. A man who has

[1] Main sources for girls' initiation: Heckel, 1935, p. 19; Stannus, 1, 1910, pp. 184–7; 4, 1922, pp. 269–74; Stannus and Duvey, 1913; Duff, 1903, pp. 312–15; Abdullah, 1919, pp. 16–17; Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 128–30; Werner, 1906, pp. 126–7; Johnston, 1897, p. 410.

1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

performed these services used to enter a special relationship of privileged familiarity with the village of the dead. This has died out in Nyasaland, but accounts of *Utasi*[1] among the Yao at Masasi and Songea suggest that something of the kind is still practised.

Chiefs and headmen are not buried outside the village, as are other persons. They used to be buried before their own huts, but now in the centre of the village. Shrines were raised over their graves, at which offerings of beer and flour were made. If the village was moved the pot of beer sunk into the ground at the chief's grave was also removed and reinstated at the new site. A dead slave was buried by his fellow slaves; normal rights of sepulture were denied to suicides and to persons who had died in taking the poison ordeal (that is, convicted sorcerers).[2]

OTHER DISTINCTIVE CULTURAL FEATURES

The Yao have a tribal mark of two short cuts on each side of the face between the eye and the ear.[3] Their women did not wear the *pelele*, lip-ring, although their neighbours the Makua and Makonde did;[4] the fashion seems to have spread to south Nyasa in the 1880's, as many travellers commented on it, without distinguishing whether the wearers were Yao, Nyanja, or Lomwe.[5] The women used to pierce the left *ala nasi* and insert a metal or lead stud, *cipini*.[6]

MAKUA-LOMWE

TRIBAL AND SUB-TRIBAL GROUPINGS AND DEMOGRAPHY

NOMENCLATURE

The *Ma-* in *Makua* is not a prefix, but part of the name, Variant spellings are *Makwa*, *Makoa*, *Mahoane*. They are sometimes referred to by the name of one subdivision, the Medo Makua, and called *Ameto* or *Meto*.[7]

The *Lomwe* (also spelt *Lomwei*) are called *Alolo* by the Yao, and are also frequently called *Anguru* (*Nguru*) which is an old name for the people of the region.[8] Any of the Makua-Lomwe peoples who have migrated into south Nyasaland are collectively termed *Nguru* in official reports; Nguru is a hill in the region of Portuguese East Africa, whence they come, but they should not be confused with the Nguru of Tanganyika.[9] Another name for them is *Acilowe*.[10] *Alolo* is incorrectly applied to all the Lomwe; it has a stricter application to the Cuabo from Quilimano.

[1] Scrivenor, 1937; Moreau, 1941; Spies, 1943.
[2] Main sources for burial are: Johnson, 3, 1922, pp. 28–30; Stannus, 4, 1922, pp. 240–6; Abdullah, 1919, pp. 19–21; Duff, 1903, pp. 322–4; Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 110–12.
[3] Murray, 1932, p. 153.
[4] Thompson, 1882, pp. 77–8, writing of the Yao of the Ruvuma valley.
[5] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 16–17; 'around Blantyre hardly any woman is without it'.
[6] Stannus, 1, 1910, p. 316.
[7] *Handbook of Portuguese Nyasaland*, 1921, p. 39; Murray, 1922, p. 56; Weule, 1, 1909, p. 259; Livingstone, 1874, p. 32.
[8] Theal, 1899, pp. 415–17; Gaspar Bocarro passed through Manguro country. Burton, 1873 (Lacerda's Journey, 1798), mentions Mangurus.
[9] Abraham, 1931, p. 15; Murray, 1922, p. 46.
[10] Johnson, W. P., 4, 1894.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

The chief identifies a man who comes to see him in exactly the same way, and the Administration has adopted a similar system, except that it has its own definition of the village. During the initiation ceremonies, the initiands [1] are housed in long grass sheds which are subdivided into sections. Each section or room of the long shed houses the boys or girls from one village. If villages share a burial ground, they have allotted portions where they bury their dead separately. In these and many other ways the village is looked upon by the Yao as a distinct unit in the chiefdom.

The chiefdom in the old days was distinctly a territorial unit and all the villages within that area recognized the superiority of the chief. The boundaries of the old chiefdoms were marked by rivers and hills and fixed after conquest and agreement. They are still well remembered. Modern chiefdoms are defined in their limits partly by Government decree and partly by custom. When Principal Headmen were appointed, the districts under them were demarcated with 'due regard being given to the composition of the Native population'. The traditional areas under the various chiefs, therefore, were recognized by the Administration as districts, so that the districts or their sections almost coincided with the chiefdoms. Some disputes between chiefs over boundaries have occurred from time to time and the Administration has had to arbitrate. For example, the Provincial Commissioner of the Southern Province reported a difference between Liwonde and Kawinga in 1936,[2] but through time these differences have been eliminated.

Traditional and Administrative boundaries do not coincide in a few places, for two reasons. Firstly, the Administration has accepted an obvious and physical boundary in preference to an indistinct and social boundary. It has taken the Domasi River as the boundary between Ntumanje and Mposa, though in fact a few villages under Mbela, Kawinga III's son, live on the south side of the river, and fall for Administrative purposes in Ntumanje's area. Mbela is still very strongly associated with Kawinga in ritual and kinship matters. His dealings with the

[1] I am grateful to Prof. Schapera for suggesting this word for those who are undergoing initiation ceremonies. The parallel is with graduands, i.e. those who are undergoing graduation ceremonies.

[2] *Report of the Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province* (1936), 20.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

strike out with his adherents to found a new village. A sum of £6 or £7 is a considerable amount in everyday Yao life where the annual cash income of the average individual is not much more. The leader of a dissident group is prepared to forgo this wealth to get one foot on to the lowest rung of the political ladder—that is by becoming a village headman.

Obversely there is a great deal of sentiment attached to the idea of a united village. To the Yao way of thinking a village is broken by fighting or death, and these evils are linked by witchcraft beliefs. The association of death and the break-up of the village is brought out clearly by the funeral ablutions of villagers after the burial of one of their number. An important ingredient in the medicine with which the mourners wash themselves after the funeral, is *cikula*. It is the earth from a particular type of termitary which is usually about 12 to 18 inches high, upright and almost cylindrical. The crust is very brittle and it is comparatively easy to chip off a piece. When this is done a mass of internal chambers and passages is revealed. The soldier ants, unlike those of other species that retreat into the darkness of their passages as soon as they are exposed, come into the open daylight and swarm in confusion over the fractured termitary. When I questioned my informant about *cikula*, he kicked the crust off the top of one of the hills and said, 'See all the houses in the village of the ants? I have broken their village. So it is with death. It breaks the village.'

The Yao believe that death 'breaks the village' and that conflicts through sorcery lead to death. Therefore, conflicts are the real cause of village splits. Hence differences must be settled immediately if the village is to persist, because if they last too long one of the aggrieved parties is sure to start using sorcery against its opponents. Those who do move away, go to a distant place because they believe that sorcery operates only where there is social interaction. But the fear of sorcery on the other hand is just as strong a force in maintaining the physical unity of the village. It is while the migration is being planned that sorcery is most likely to be used. This is particularly so if the village break is taking the form of a lineage split. This happened, for example, in Lupunje village.

Kalambo, the sister's son of Lupunje, wanted to leave the village and had gone to seek a suitable site. When he returned he found that

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

his mother was ill and had gone with Lupunje's younger brother to the diviner to find out the cause of the illness. The diviner indicated that Lupunje thought that Kalambo was not showing him the proper respect. Lupunje knew that his sisters had lost their value in the lineage since they had stopped bearing children, whereas Kalambo's sisters were still reproducing. His malice had caused the woman's illness. When Kalambo got home he asked his mother's brother to blow water out of his mouth [1] and help him to prepare some medicine for the sick woman. This Lupunje did and the woman recovered immediately.

Shortly afterwards Kalambo remonstrated with his mother's brother for causing the illness of his sister, but Lupunje said that he had no control over it: the spirits had brought it on her. Kalambo knew that he could do nothing and abandoned the idea of building his own village. He knew that there was bound to be more illness if he carried on with his plan.

Clearly the belief in the mystical powers of the ancestors or of sorcery is a force which prevents sections from breaking away from the village. A break follows only when opposition within the village has reached sufficient pitch to force one of the sections to take the risk of illness, rather than to continue living in the village. Sometimes the dissident group comes back because further deaths at their new village site convince them that their action was wrong.[2]

Effects of the Headman's Personality

Whether a village maintains its unity or not, depends very largely on the personality of the headman. This is why the officiating headmen and others at the installation ceremonies are so insistent that cases should be settled quickly. The main duty of a headman is to maintain harmonious relationships within his village and to see to the welfare of its members. All severe illnesses are immediately reported to him, and so are the results of all divinations. He usually sends his representative to divinations concerning kinsmen not related to him matrilineally. He is immediately notified of all deaths and he organizes the funeral rites. Squabbles are brought to him for arbitration and even where squabbles are settled by kinsmen in the village, usually the headman is formally told of them. Frequently marriage diffi-

[1] An act which recants malice. See Chap. VI, p. 139.

[2] See the case history in Chap. VI, p. 153.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

'sisters' and 'mothers' because alternate generations are merged in kinship terminology and in behaviour. A man's sister's daughter, for example, is called 'mother', and her daughter (his granddaughter) in turn becomes 'sister'. A woman calls her male matrilineal descendants 'children' (*mwanangu*), or 'grandchildren' (*yisikulu*); her matrilineal male progenitors 'mother's brother' (*akwelume*), or 'brother' (*alumbwangu*).[1] By extension, therefore, another way of expressing common matrilineal descent is to say that two people are the children of one person, *wanakajumo*, even though that person may be their great-grandmother. A term which is almost synonymous with this is *mucitumbu cimo*, 'in one womb', used as 'we were conceived in one womb', though once again the reference may be to a common grandmother. But the inclusiveness of these terms varies in different contexts. Any may refer to the matrilineage of maximal span within the village, or to a section of the matrilineage seen as a segmented organization of parts. It is only by reference to the particular ancestress that the range of the term may be determined.

The Unity of the Matrilineage

A person identifies himself most closely with the members of his matrilineage from whom he expects most help and whom he, in turn, is expected to help. If he is called upon to pay a heavy fine it will be the members of his own matrilineage who will club together to find sufficient money. They, more than others, support him in his quarrels. They come to his aid when he is ill or injured, by consulting the diviner and trying to find the sorcerer who is causing his illness, and by finding medicines which will bring him back to good health. They send him money if he has left the country and needs it to return. The goods he brings home from the labour centres will be shared mostly among his matrilineal relatives. They will find the food to be used at his funeral and also see that his burial is properly carried out. He owes these duties in turn to them. His property will stay almost entirely within the matrilineage after his death.

Relationship, unless qualified, is looked upon as being entirely matrilineal. This is well illustrated by the beliefs about the

[1] She more commonly addresses them as *acimweni*. See p. 147.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

613 578 754 Kausi (F3), Bt. Madi (F10), Bt. Aliya (F11) and their children moved across the stream and built with Cikoja. One of Cikoja's wives stayed in the old village and the other moved across. Shortly after this Asimama (E6), Cikoja's sister, decided that she would like to move across to be with the headman. She reported to Kanyenga who sent her to tell Cikoja. Cikoja in turn sent her to tell Amidu. Eventually, Cikoja, Amidu, Kanyenga and Salimu (D3) had a meeting about it. Neither Amidu nor Kanyenga, nor Salimu, was enthusiastic, but they said she should follow her own wishes. She moved across with her children. Asimama's arrival on the other side of the stream was greeted with some suspicion by Cilimba because she was a member of the junior lineage. However, Cikoja assured him that he wanted one of Asimama's daughters to fetch water for him. Cilimba was satisfied with this explanation and accepted the situation as it was.

It was not easy, however, and there were continual quarrels between the children of Bt. Ntalika and those of Asimama. The members of the junior segment in the old village also looked upon this arrangement with some suspicion. The friendship of Amege (F28), Asimama's daughter, with Asubiya (E9), her mother's younger sister was particularly deprecated by the members of the junior segment. Asubiya was warned several times that this friendship could only lead to sorcery.[1]

In the meantime, Salimu (D3), who will be the next Cikoja and who was the senior lineage member in the old village site, undertook most of the duties of the headman in that section. He settled most of the minor cases and saw to the divining. However, he reported his doings to Cikoja who was still the village headman.

In 1948, another death took place and the tension became evident again. Bt. Ntalika's child died. Kausi (F3) and Jauma (F7) went to the diviner, who revealed that Amege had gone to Salimu to grumble about what was going on in the other village, and Salimu had taken this opportunity of bewitching the child. Cikoja refused to accept this explanation and said that the diviner was a liar. When the body was being washed, a knife was found under the mat on which it was lying, and the story went around that a piece of flesh was taken out of the dead child's buttock.[2] Cikoja interpreted this as meaning that Bt. Ntalika herself had bewitched the child. He felt it unnecessary to call a funeral meeting. Shortly after this there was some friction between Amisa and her younger sister Asubiya, arising out of jealousy because of the difference in their harvests. Bt. Amisa was convinced

[1] This is based on the fear of backbiting. See p. 138.

[764] [2] Once a person is dead the matrilineal relatives do not touch him. They leave the hut and the undertakers (*aŵilo*) wash the body and prepare it for burial. They reported this finding to Cikoja.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

one of Malemya's men died, after giving birth to quintuplets, some thirty years ago. Deformed children are buried alive. A large number of children is always hoped for and where polygamy is practiced, some families are of considerable size, although the mortality among young children is very high. It is, of course, very difficult to state the child-bearing period among natives. It does not start so early as is commonly supposed, and I think the menopause is found within about the same limits as among Europeans.

Death. Natives of Nyasaland live to a good old age. That such is not the case I have found to be one of the many fallacious beliefs concerning natives which should be relegated to the realm of exploded theories, as I have pointed out elsewhere.[1]

Death in old age is recognized as a natural event but apart from this, all sickness and death were formerly and are still to a large extent looked upon as the result of the machinations of some person, an idea which forms the outstanding feature in their belief in witchcraft, uselul.[2]

Here I shall mention the ordinary customs in the case of death. During the last hours of a mortal illness, a man is tended by his wife or wives; the head wife sits constantly supporting his head on her lap or against her breast. A woman is similarly tended by her mother, sisters, and friends. As unconsciousness sets in and the extremities become cold, they say, "His spirit has gone and only the heart remains alive."

The native does not like the idea of lingering on and a man on his death-bed will say to his sons, "Now watch me that I die quickly." He may take medicine to help him over that time or he may give his sons instructions as to what to do. Should a man linger unconscious for a long time, friends will ask his sons, "Did he give you any instructions?" If he has done so, the sons will then carry them out. This perhaps consists of bathing themselves in medicines left by their father, while they stand on the roof of his house. Sometimes, the natives say of a lingering case, "Ah, perhaps he has eaten of a tortoise's heart!" knowing the phenomenon of the tortoise's heart and believing that by partaking of it, the same property can be conferred on the heart of a man.

When death is manifest, the body is covered with a cloth by a brother, a son, or some other person in attendance. The eyes are closed, the mouth shut, and at the present time, the body straightened out. This, however, is a recent practice copied from the Anyanja, Europeans, and Mohammedans.

News of the death must be sent to the chief, and a messenger goes to his village where the chief and his people sit in the village open space. He carries a fowl in his hand. The present of a single fowl always denotes bad tidings. One of the chief's men, seeing the stranger approach with the single fowl, will jump up and take the bird. He is joined by the others and they go away to the cross-roads where they kill the fowl, pluck it, cook it and eat it. In the meantime, the messenger delivers his news to the chief who will produce from his house about eight yards of white calico; if the deceased has been a much respected

[1] Hugh S. Stannus, 'The life-span of negroes', (*Lancet*, April 11, 1914, p. 1063). [2] Vide infra, p. 288.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

person, he may also give a goat. The calico is to wrap up the body of the dead, the goat is for the undertakers, *ausilo*.[1]

Until eight or ten years ago, the Wayao buried their dead in a posture of complete flexion. The preparation of the body after death is carried out by friends from a neighboring village who volunteer for the service. They are known as *ausilo*, (sing. *mbilo*). Macdonald[2] thinks the word originally meant relatives; it has essentially the opposite meaning now. The corpse is washed in ordinary water and no anointment is made. The limbs, formerly, were then flexed on the body and at all the joints. The clenched hands were placed under the chin of the bent head or the hands were spread over the face of the flexed head, while the legs were tightly bent at the knees and brought up close against the abdomen. The corpse was securely bound in this position and adorned with a loin-cloth of bark. The body of a man found stiff and extended was a source of great trouble. Water was heated, and the body bathed until it was as relaxed as possible. As much force would then be applied as was necessary to gain the required degree of flexion, the bones often being broken in the process.

In the case of a woman, her female friends put on her bark-cloth loin covering, but the washing and trussing up of the body were usually done by men unless there were some women particularly skilled in the operation.

The flexed body was then set up on the deceased's sleeping mat within the hut, and from time to time, so long as it remained exposed, it was washed, people coming from other villages to offer their services for this task. Watchers sat continually by the body, the wife and perhaps a brother on either side, while others slept in the hut to take their turn later. The rest of the mourners sat on the veranda about the door.

As soon as the *ausilo* had finished their work, wailing began, started by the wife and carried on by all the women of the village and the women relatives from elsewhere. Wailing continued all day until about ten in the evening, and then started again between two and three in the morning. This went on for three or four days or was intermittent for a longer time, always recommencing with the arrival of a party from another village. I have never heard of flour being put on the heads by Yao mourners, as mentioned in *Africana*.[3]

News of a death was always sent to all the relatives, and burial might be delayed to allow for the arrival of those from a distance. Under such circumstances, the body was enclosed in a casing of bark, the ends being closed by bamboo pegs. Exaggerated signs of grief were sometimes made by the mourners who beat their breasts with their hands while they knocked their heads against the ground or a wall, but the Yao did not indulge in the excesses of the Anyanja near Lake Chilwa who practiced a kind of flagellation, the wailers within the house meeting any new-comers at the door and beating them with sticks. This treatment was not resented. Women alone did the wailing; a man indulging in such expression would be laughed at. His part in the old days when the natives possessed firearms was

[1] Vide infra, p. 244. [2] Op. cit., vol. I, p. 103. [3] Ibid.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

765 [534] to fire off his gun as long as his powder lasted. During the period of mourning, drumming went on continuously, *chindimba* being played on the three small drums called *tchewa*.

With the exception of the flexed attitude of the body, the foregoing description is a correct account of what happens today. The body is now fully extended.

767 The *awile* are two or four in number, although other friends may assist in all their services. On about the third day, the *awile* sew up the body in bark cloth, completely enveloping it; 764 a bamboo needle is used and left sticking in the cloth at the last stitch. The body is then enclosed in a mat slung on a pole, and carried from the hut to the grave. First, the procession makes a round of the village, passing by all the houses which the dead man used to visit, and over all the paths he used to cross. His children and those of his relatives under seven or eight years old gather in the village, and throw pieces of charcoal toward the body as it passes, "so that they shall forget the dead man," or run after the corpse, while some one sprinkles medicine over them.

764 [534] As the procession leaves the village, it is headed by the drums playing *chindimba*, but after a few hundred yards, only the *ching'anga* drum, now called *chitanda*, beats time for a short distance; the procession then goes on quietly. Following the drums, walks the mother or another relative carrying flour with which the grave will be marked out. Behind this mourner, the body is borne by the *awile*. The *awile* are always the first to carry the body, but are later relieved by other friends of the deceased; no one would ever ask to be relieved.

[114] After the chief mourner, follow the other relatives and friends, the men first, the women behind. Boys just back from their *unyago* attend to learn the customs. All the relatives of the deceased go to the burial, contrary to Macdonald's account.[1]

In this order, the procession reaches some tree thirty or forty yards from the place of burial where the corpse is put down in the shade, *mtula*, "resting place", and while the women and part of the men watch beside it, the *awile* proceed to the burial place. They cut branches from a sacred tree, and strew them on the path. On approaching the appointed spot, they clap their hands in salutation, asking that the burial ground be opened to them.

The head *mbilo* chooses the site where the grave shall be dug, after which the mourner marks out the limits with the flour she has brought. In the days when the body was buried in contracted posture, a circular grave was dug just big enough to allow two men to work in it. Eight feet was the usual depth but this was decided by the deceased's *nyoose*, if he were living, otherwise, by his near relatives. In the east side of this circular well, a cave was excavated, just large enough to admit the contracted corpse. When all was prepared, the body accompanied by all the mourners, was brought from *mtula* to the graveside. The chief *mbilo* with a friend of the man's family and one of his wife's, standing in the grave received the body and placed it in the cave, resting on a mat and covered with bark cloth. The body lay on its side with its back toward the well, and its face looking

[1] Op. cit., vol. I, p. 106.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

toward the east. After adjusting the body in its place, the *mbilo* would tear open the shroud over the ear, and pour on to the pluna some powdered beads to be used by the dead man as money in the hereafter. Except in the case of chiefs, no objects were buried with the dead, contrary to Macdonald's description [1] of the Amangoche. The pole on which the body had been carried to the grave was broken into bits and together with any stick that had been used to measure the body for the cave, was placed in the grave. The opening into the chamber was then closed by a mat fastened over it by pegs and supported by pieces of wood. The *mbilo* clambering out of the well, pushed the first earth backward into the grave with their elbows, after which the rest of the earth was shovelled in quickly, and a heap made at the surface. The ground about this mound was swept clean with a bunch of leaves by some one walking backward so that no footprints were left; the bunch of leaves was thrown on top of the mound. No medicine was put in the grave, nor were the household utensils placed on the mound, as Macdonald states concerning the Amangoche.[2]

For some years past, the type of grave made among the Yao has resembled that of the Anyanja,[3] a long pit with a chamber scooped out along the whole length of one side. In this, the corpse is placed in a fully extended position so that it lies on its back with the feet toward the east. With this exception, the account given above holds good for the present day. The method of suspending the corpse in a mat slung on forked sticks within the grave, mentioned in *Africana*,[4] is not found among the Amachinga Yao.

On the way back to the village, two *mbilo* lead, followed by the men, the women, and lastly, by the other *mbilo*. First, all wash, the men upstream, the women downstream; no one may wash another's back. The hoes used in digging the grave are also washed; hoes are never washed on any other occasion.

During the funeral, some responsible old man is left in charge of the village with several younger men to assist him. Just before the return of the funeral party is expected, the old man sends one of the younger men to set medicine at the side of the path along which the mourners will pass. This medicine is made from the bark of the *mpingo* tree and is used for purification; it is placed in a sherd. Each person as he arrives at the spot squats down, dips the little finger of each hand into the medicine, and passes the fingers between the little toe and the third toe of the corresponding foot. The last comer throws any remaining medicine into the bush. As they near the village, a gun is fired and wailing is resumed for a few minutes, after which it ceases altogether. The old man who has been left in charge of the village always inquires whether all has gone well at the interment.

That evening, the time is passed in singing *chisolwa*.[5] All those who attended the burial, sleep in the village, and if the deceased's relatives can afford to provide the necessary food, all remain in the village for a number of days equal to the period which elapsed between death and burial. Sometimes, when burial was long delayed, the mourning party

[1] Op. cit., vol. I, p. 107.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Stannus, 'Notes on natives of British Central Africa,' op. cit., p. 813.
[4] Macdonald, op. cit., p. 106.
[5] Vide infra, p. 267, 270.

3: Stanmus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

then listens to an account of the circumstances attending the illness and death. The point at issue is whether there is any evidence pointing to death from unnatural causes which requires consulting a diviner. The chief practically always agrees with the relatives, and it is said that he will never press them to go to the *wachisanje* unnecessarily. The case may end with this conference, or here may begin the long series of events described under *usuzi*.[1]

During the month subsequent to the funeral, certain taboos have to be observed. The widow may not bathe, and with the exception of the *awile*, all who attended must refrain from sexual intercourse. At the expiration of this period, beer is brewed in the village, and all the friends and relatives are again summoned. This beer-drinking is called "the beer of rottenness," or "the beer of resignation." In addition to the beer, food is provided, and everyone helps himself without ceremony. *Chindimba* is sung and danced and at the present day, bands of trained dancers attend, including *ching'wenyeng' wenye*.[2] A pot of beer is sunk into the ground, marking the site of the dead man's house. The night of *matapata*[3] sees husbands and wives reunited, and the widow may go through ceremonial intercourse with a man appointed for the purpose called *lituwu* or *mbilo*. Sometimes the widow refuses *lituwu*, and is given medicine instead to cleanse her; her body is then no longer "hot" and likely to bring disease to those about her. A widow does not marry again for two or three years. A young man who loses his wife has no longer any standing in her village after *matapata*. He is usually given a present, with the suggestion that he go elsewhere. After the death of an infant, the mother is considered unclean. She sleeps on a mat apart from her husband till after the ceremony of shaving, and then undergoes a ceremonial coitus with her husband — in which case he is called *lituwu* — after which, ordinary cohabitation is resumed. If she has been a widow, or if the child was born "with disease,"[4] another man acts as *lituwu*.

The morning following *matapata*, all the fires in the village are extinguished. A fresh blaze is then kindled with the fire-drill, *lumangu*, either in the chief's house or in some spot nearby, and from there, fire is carried to all the houses. The ashes of the old fires, the stones supporting the cooking pots, and the porridge sticks are taken to the cross-roads, and there destroyed. Everyone then shaves all his own hair, head, axillae, and pubis. The custom of the second shaving by the *awile*, described in *Africana*,[5] is, I think, an adaptation from the Anyanja. A year later, beer is again brewed, and all the relatives summoned to the village to partake of it. There is dancing, but no ceremony.

The Yao bury their dead in regular graveyards in wooded country, the thicker the forest the better, often two or three miles away from a group of villages. Different villages bury their dead in different parts of the burial ground; relatives are usually buried near one another. Graves are never revisited, and no one would enter a graveyard except at the time of a funeral, and then only after obtaining permission from the chief. Such spots are

[1] Vide infra, p. 286.
[2] Beer-drinking.
[3] Macdonald, op. cit., p. 111.
[4] Vide infra, p. 279 and Pl. I.
[5] Vide infra, p. 286.

7: Hetherwick M-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FT7 Yao FT7

present fortunes. But it is to the human soul after death, when it is considered as having an influence on the lives and fortunes of those it has left behind in the world and consequently as a power to be propitiated and honoured, that the term *malungu* is more strictly applied. Freed from the body it passes to *malungu*, and there is regarded as endowed with powers which it never possessed when alive on earth. To pray to such a spirit is described as *kulomba malungu*, to worship *malungu*, never *kimba* in this case. Such *malungu* worship enters largely into Yao religious or social life. In almost every Yao village there will be found a shrine which is the centre of the worship of the inhabitants. It consists of a carefully built hut enclosed within a strong grass fence or hedge of a species of cactus plant. The hut itself is built of the usual native materials—the walls of wooden posts, bamboos, and strong reed grass bound together with bark-rope and plastered over with clay or stiff mud. The roof is of grass laid on a framework of bamboos, and is generally covered with long strips of white or coloured calico. On the ridge or apex of the roof are fixed a couple of flags or an umbrella or two. One wall is usually left open so that the interior is easily seen. Within, from the bamboo rafters are suspended handkerchiefs, cloths, bunches of beads, etc., all offerings to the *malungu* of the dead headman or chief from his friends and relatives. The floor is of clay carefully smeared with sand in native fashion. A raised platform or mound of earth in the centre marks the spot where the grave was made. The *awile* or officials who preside at the funeral obsequies, first dug for about 8 or 10 feet down in a perpendicular direction, and then on the western side of this well they hollowed out a shallow cave in the earth. In this the body was placed, laid on its side with the knees bent up under the chin, and the face turned towards the east. Various articles of personal property were next placed beside the corpse, clothes, ivory, guns, axes, hoes, etc., and the mouth of the cave closed up with wooden posts and a strong reed mat. The grave was then filled in and the surface carefully finished as we have seen. At the head of the mound a native pot was fixed in the ground for the reception of the offering of beer which is an almost invariable accompaniment of any act of worship paid to the *malungu* of the dead.

. Such a shrine marks the grave of almost every Yao chief or headman, and is regarded as the abode of his soul or the spot where his *malungu* is most accessible. If his successor is about to undertake a long journey or enter on any warlike expedition against an enemy or neighbour, he must first *kutopa mbepesi*, place an offering here to secure the favour and assistance of the *malungu* of the dead. Should a long-continued drought endanger the prospects of the grain crop, the departed chief must be solicited to send the lacking rain. A feast is first prepared, almost always of beer, sometimes with the addition of native porridge, fowl, or game. The worshippers gather round the shrine bringing part of the food which they have prepared. Their priest for the occasion is the successor of the dead chief, sometimes one or other of the *awile* who placed the body in the grave, or it may be that any other near relation of the dead man is chosen to represent the people and act as their spokesman. The nearer the relationship the more influence will he have with the dead.

7: Hetherwick M-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FT7 Yao FT7

with the dead. He approaches the shrine, opens the gate of the fence, takes a potful of beer and pours it into the pot at the head of the grave. Next he places the basket of porridge and the plate of meat on the mound beside it and retires. Kneeling down outside the gate facing the shrine and a few yards in front of the people he chants his prayer in a monotone, each petition commencing with "Chonde, chonde," "Please, please." All the while the people clap their hands in unison with him and sing the response as they do in a native case in the chief's court.

When the offering has been made at the grave, the rest of the beer or other food is consumed by the worshippers. Guns are fired as a token of respect to the dead, and the rest of the day is spent in dancing.

Such shrines are to be seen in almost every Yao village where the inhabitants have been located for any length of time. They are regarded with awe—the little boys as they pass whisper to each other in a warning tone, "mawka." Should the village be moved to any other district, the old shrine is not forgotten. Periodical visits are made to it with the usual offerings. In cases where the old home has been occupied by a people hostile to the old inhabitants, such visits are usually made during the night, and the people awake in the morning to find that the old chief's grave in their midst has been newly repaired, and a fresh offering of food placed at its head.

Sometimes such shrines are found on the summits of hills which once may have been a refuge from the enemy in time of war, but which now lie lone and deserted. Thither in their need the people make their way with their offering of food and beer, and their prayer for rain or suitable weather for the crops. Near Blantyre such shrines are to be seen on the tops of Mount Sochi and Mount Michiru. The former is the abode of the spirit of Kankhomba, and the latter of Mpalale, both old Maravi or Mang'anja chiefs who doubtless fled there seeking safety from the war of the invading Yaos, and died leaving their wonder to be the *mulungu* or spirit of the mountain. Some years ago, during the fear of an Angoni invasion, the Yaos of Mount Sochi fled to the hill-top for refuge, and there the old chief Kapeni died. He was buried close to the grave of the old Kankhomba, and now, when the Yaos on Sochi make an offering, it is to the spirit of Kapeni that the homage is paid, and the shrine of Kankhomba lies neglected.

Only the graves of chiefs or headmen are thus treated as shrines of worship. The burying place of slaves and the common people lies away in the thick bush, where only the rank grass or the thicket of old trees marks the spot. No offerings are ever taken there, for such as are buried there can have no influence in the spirit world. The dead are buried, the broken pot or basket is left on the grave to mark the spot, and none ever seek to go there save to lay another in the same neglected ground.

II. But the word *mulungu* is used by the Yao with a wider application. Etymologically the word is connected with the root *kulanywa*, which in so many of the other branches of the Bantu tongue appears as *kulu* or *kuru*, and signifies "great" or "old." It is the same root which appears in the Kaffir word for God,

10: Sanderson D-5 (ca. 1920)1922 FT7 Yao FT7

55

A Note on Ceremonial Purification among the WaYao, Nyasaland.

By Meredith Sanderson, M.R.C.S., F.R.G.S.

One of the effects of European influence in Africa is the breaking up of tribal organization and discipline. The rights of the individual being no longer subordinated to the common good, customs formerly observed by the village community as a whole die out, while those affecting the individual are still practised.

This tendency is well seen in the ancient ceremonies of purification among the WaYao which are now rarely performed collectively, though the native, however highly "educated," still goes to the doctor to obtain the necessary medicines for removing, for instance, the contamination caused by contact with a corpse.

These collective ceremonies have already been described by various writers in respect of both Nyasaland and elsewhere,† but the Yao rites have not, I think, been given in detail, and the following notes may not, therefore, be altogether valueless.

The *Pyajila* ceremony (*kuppajila*, "to sweep") is common to most Bantu tribes. In its simplest form it used to be performed annually by the WaYao, at the beginning of the twelfth month, whilst the months (lunar) being kept by means of a "calendar."‡ The whole village is thoroughly "spring-cleaned," all rubbish

* At Ku, where the game is played on All Souls' night in the morning, Father Barnabas Nyao tells me, the song in Spanish time:—

Yaso, yaso, quando te vengo,
Yaso, yaso, hoy mato.

Yaso, yaso, when you come,
Yaso, yaso, I shall not be there any more.

Words imported, presumably, to the hidden half.

† *Ibo Mythology*, M. C., "The Ibibi Initiation," pp. 240 241, XXIII. *Annual Report, Bureau American Ethnology*, 1904.

‡ Fraser, "Golden Bough Scientist," II., 170, 499.

§ A "calendar" consists of a string tied to two pegs in the wall of the house, or between two poles, on which are threaded twelve pieces of reed, bamboo or cornstalk. One of these is moved to the other end of the string each time a new moon is seen.

10: Sanderson D-5 (ca. 1920)1922 FT7 Yao FT7

The men and boys now pass through the arch in order of seniority; each splashes himself with the water in the trough, but neither speaks nor rinses the mouth. The women come next, led by the head-wife of the chief; the latter rinses her mouth and, instructed by the doctor, repeats a prayer similar to that offered by her husband. The remainder of the women merely splash themselves, like the men, before passing through the arch. All then return to the village, where the *ppojilo* is continued.

Finally the doctor takes the hammer-head from the trough and hands it to the chief, who rubs the haft into it, and, a hoe having been placed on the ground, goes through the form of forging the latter by beating it with the hammer. He then scrapes the ground with the hoe as if clearing a place overgrown with grass; he does not dig with it so as to turn up the ground for planting seed. After this rite the chief again bathes in medicated water similar to that in the trough, and the ceremony is complete.

Whereas the *ppojilo* ceremony and its adjunct, the rite of the arch, are now but rarely performed, no Yao will omit the rite of purification after a death in his family. This ceremony consists of two essential parts, both protective against the *ndoko*, a disease characterized by dropsy and supposed to be contracted by contact with a corpse, or by association, especially by sharing a meal, with those who have been in such contact. The first of these parts is bathing in certain medicines, which protects the bather from *ndoko*, and the second consists of a sort of communion meal, shared by all friends and especially relatives with those who have been contaminated, and designed to protect them-friends and relatives.

The decoction for bathing is made by soaking the roots of *Isquiroketi* and *Isudumole* in water, together with the bark of *mbawara*, one piece each from the east and west aspects of the two; the water assumes a reddish tint, and the whole body is bathed.

The communion meal consists of porridge made from any kind of flour or of rice, and some spends beans. In the latter some scorched and powdered root of *mkandenjelele* is mixed, with a little salt. All near relatives of the deceased must partake of this meal, as well as their wives and their near relatives; part is carefully put aside for the use of any relative unable to be present at the ceremony.

Latterly, since the spread of Islam among the WaYao, this rite has become confused with the distribution of food to the poor at the funeral of a Muslim, and the Arabic word *sadaqa* ("charity") is now generally used for it, to the exclusion of its wider, correct meaning.

It may be mentioned here that after the death of a child the father is denied access to his wife for a period of about three weeks, and the first act must be one of entire interpretation.

MERIDITH SANDERSON.